

CHAPTER TWO

INSTRUCTIONS FOR VOTING ASSISTANCE OFFICERS

OVERVIEW

Chapter Two of this *Voting Assistance Guide* provides more specific information and/or instructions on:

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2. The Absentee Voting Process
3. Registration and Ballot Request
4. Requirements for Voting, Establishing Voting Residence and Registration
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1. The *Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA)*

The *Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA)* allows certain U.S. citizens to vote absentee. A complete text of the *UOCAVA* is in *Appendix D*.

The *UOCAVA* applies to:

- Members of the U.S. Uniformed Services (on active duty) and merchant marine
- Their family members
- U.S. citizens residing outside the U.S.

Members of the U.S. Uniformed Services or merchant marine and their family members may vote absentee while away from their place of voting residence, wherever stationed, within or outside the United States.

The *UOCAVA* also applies to U.S. citizens residing outside the United States and its territories. These citizens may vote in the state or territory where they last resided immediately prior to departing the United States, even if many years have elapsed and the citizen maintains no residence in the state or territory and the intent to return to that state or territory may not be certain. Most states and territories permit these citizens to vote in elections for Federal offices only although some states may send a ballot containing local, state and Federal offices.

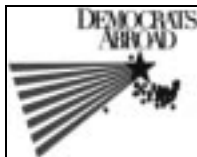
The *UOCAVA* provides that voting for Federal offices shall not affect the determination of the voter's place of residence for purposes of any tax imposed under Federal, state or local law. Liability for state income tax, however, may be incurred in some states by voting absentee in state or local elections. To assess the probability of incurring state taxes on income earned outside the United States, see *Appendix E* and consult legal counsel for details.

The Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) encourages citizens to bring problems encountered in the voting process to the attention of the Embassy or Consulate Voting Assistance Officers. If a problem cannot be resolved locally, then contact the FVAP.

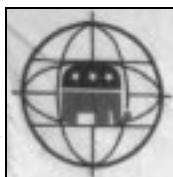
The two major political parties in the United States (Democratic and Republican) have branches in many countries throughout the world. Further information concerning overseas political activities by either the

Democratic or Republican Party may be obtained by contacting:

Democrats Abroad
P.O. Box 6430
Alexandria, VA 22306-6430
World Wide Web:
www.democratsabroad.org
E-mail: democratsabroad@erols.com
Fax: (703) 768-0920
Phone: (703) 768-3174



Republicans Abroad
310 First St., S.E.
Washington, DC 20003
World Wide Web:
www.republicansabroad.org
E-mail: republicansai@mindspring.com
Fax: (202) 608-1431
Phone: (202) 608-1423



You may link to the above organizations through the FVAP Website at www.fvap.ncr.gov.

2. The Absentee Voting Process

The absentee voting process permits citizens covered by the *Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA)*, who will be away from their local polling places on election day, to vote through the mail or an alternative method. Absentee voters should request their ballots at least 60 days before the election due to the nature of the process.

In order to register, and/or vote absentee, an eligible U.S. citizen must carefully and accurately complete a Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) and then submit it to the proper election official. Specific instructions for completing the FPCA for each state and territory are contained in Chapter 3.

Finally, it is important to note that U.S. citizens overseas may receive voting assistance at military installations, at the discretion of the installation Commanding Officer. United States citizens are afforded full voting assistance at all U.S. Embassies and Consulates. They may also use APO and FPO facilities, including the Department of State pouch, to mail FPCAs and other voting materials back to the U.S.

3. Registration and Ballot Request

Persons who are away from their legal voting residence must follow the guidelines of their state or territory for voting absentee. Chapter 3 describes these requirements in detail. In addition, citizens and VAOs are urged to note deadlines carefully. These vary depending on whether the citizen registers and requests a ballot simultaneously or simply needs to request a ballot.

Consult Chapter 3 for the proper method to complete the FPCA to request registration and a ballot from each state and territory.

4. Requirements for Voting, Establishing Voting Residence and Registration

Citizenship and Age

Every state and territory prescribes two voter requirements:

- A voter must be a citizen of the United States on the date of the election in which he or she wishes to vote; and,
- A voter must be at least 18 years old on election day in order to vote. Some states permit a 17-year-old to vote in primary elections if he or she will be 18 by the date of the general election.

Voting Residence

The issue of voting residence is complex. Even in states where laws clearly define criteria for determining a person's voting residence, the final determination is generally up to each local election official.

The UOCAVA allows citizens outside the United States (not affiliated with the military) to vote in the state or territory where they last resided immediately prior to departing the United States, even if many years have elapsed, and the voter maintains no residence in the state or territory and, the intent to return to that state or territory may not be certain.

For members of the military and their family members, in most states the legal voting residence is defined as where they have, or have had, physical presence at the location and, simultaneously, the intent to remain or return.

If a citizen is uncertain about his or her current or former legal voting residence, the citizen should examine his or her connections or ties to the state or territory in question. Further, voting assistance personnel who have difficulty advising citizens of their proper voting residence or registration status should consult legal counsel or request assistance from their installation or agency Voting Assistance Officer.

Questions to Help Establish Voting Residence

The following questions may aid voting assistance personnel in advising citizens on voting residence:

- Where is your home or home of record?
- What state or territory are you from?

- Where did you live before coming here?
- Where did you live immediately before leaving the United States?
- Where does your family live?
- Where do your parents live?
- Where do you own property?
- Where do you engage in any businesses?
- Where do you have bank accounts?
- Where is your motor vehicle registered?
- What state or territory has issued you a driver's license, any other license or identification card?
- Where are you a member of any organization?
- Where have you registered to vote?
- Where have you voted?

Registration

In some states, registration may not be necessary to vote. If there is any doubt about registration status, the FVAP advises citizens to apply early for registration. Chapter 3 addresses specific registration requirements and information for each state and territory.

Questions to Help Establish Current Registration

Voter registration can be affected or cancelled for several reasons: not voting for a period of time, changed residence since the last registration or election, changed name since the last registration or election, or changing political party preference since the last registration.

This set of questions should aid in the determination of current registration:

- Are you registered to vote?
- Where and when did you register?
- Where and when have you voted? (See Chapter 3 for state or territory provisions on cancellation of registration for not voting.)
- Have you changed your address since you last registered?
- Have you changed your name since you last registered or voted?
- Have you changed your party affiliation since you last registered?

5. Completing the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA)

In order to register, and/or request an absentee ballot, an eligible U.S. citizen must carefully and accurately complete a FPCA before submitting to the proper election official. However, the extent and manner of FPCA usage is controlled by state and territory law and

sometimes by local procedure. Because of varying state and territory procedures, the citizen should refer to Chapter 3 when completing the FPCA.

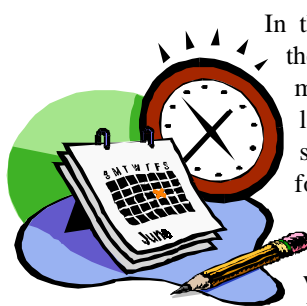
State and Local Treatment of the FPCA

In all states and territories, the FPCA serves as a valid request for registration and/or absentee ballot, for those citizens entitled to use it, regardless of whether they have registered prior to the submission of the FPCA. For such citizens, registration is either waived or considered accomplished upon submission of the FPCA requesting a ballot.

A few states also require submission of their own registration form for permanent registration. Usually the local election official will send this form with the ballot. Refer to individual state procedures in Chapter 3.

Deadline for Submitting the FPCA

In about half the states and territories, the deadline for submitting the FPCA is the same for all those entitled to use it, regardless of whether or not the citizen is on the voter registration rolls for that state or territory. In the remainder of the states and territories there will be two deadlines: one for the registered voter and one for the nonregistered voter.



In this latter category of states, the nonregistered voter usually must submit the FPCA to the local election official by the state's or territory's deadline for voter registration (usually 30 days prior to the election). The registered voter may have a later deadline. The citizen should

refer to his or her state or territory in Chapter 3 for further details.

However, every registered citizen is strongly urged to submit the FPCA so that it is received by the election official at least 45 days prior to the election. Unregistered citizens are urged to submit the FPCA so that it arrives at least 60 days prior to the election. This helps to ensure timely delivery of the ballot to the citizen.

In some states and territories, one FPCA will secure for the applicant both primary and general election ballots for an entire calendar year. In these states, it is not necessary to submit an FPCA for each election during the year. If a state permits this procedure, you will find the policy stated in Chapter 3.

FPCA Completion Instructions (Revised 1995)

Type or print all information in dark (black preferred) ink. Refer to Chapter 3 for particular items required by each state and territory to complete the FPCA. Fill in state, county, city or township of voting residence at the top of the form and all other required items in accordance with the following instructions:

- (1) **Applicant Information** — Full name; sex; race; date of birth; social security number; and other identification (passport, ID card).
- (2) **I Last Voted or Place of Last Registration** — Enter year; county, city or township; state; voter registration number (if known).
- (3) **Voting Residence** — Enter complete voting residence. If you must use a rural route number, be as descriptive as possible so that election officials can determine your proper voting district.
- (4) **Mail Absentee Ballot To** — Provide the mailing address where you want the ballot delivered.



VAOs should also remind citizens to use the FPCA to notify their local election officials of address changes.

- (5) **Your Fax Number** — Provide your fax number. Refer to this *Guide* to determine which states and territory allow faxing.
- (6) **Political Party Affiliation** — Enter information here, if required by your state or territory to vote in a primary election.
- (7) **Remarks** — Use this space to provide any information which may assist local election officials in processing this application, including a maiden name or other name used, the name and telephone number of a local contact person and/or your e-mail address. Also, if you are requesting a state special write-in ballot, indicate the reason for it. Finally, if required by your state, place gummed labels in Item 7 to request a state special write-in ballot.
- (8) **Affirmation By Applicant** — Read items a through d and mark the appropriate box with an X. In most states, marking a, b or c will entitle you to receive a full ballot from the state or territory. Marking b or c generally means that at some future time you intend to reside again in that state or territory. Marking box d generally

indicates that you were a resident of the state or territory before departing the U.S. and your intent to return at some time in the future may be uncertain. Marking block d applies for a ballot for Federal offices only (if one is printed by the state or territory).

If you reside outside the U.S. and wish to avoid classifying yourself as a state resident for tax purposes, mark block 8 d. However, if the state sends a full ballot because it does not print a separate ballot for Federal offices only, you may vote the full ballot.

In Item 8 use block i and j (Signature of Applicant and Date) to sign and date this application.

- (9) **Witness/Notary Address And Signature** — Consult the *Guide* to determine which election material may require a witness or notary. If more space is required to complete this, use Item 7 (Remarks) or a separate piece of paper.

The FPCA also contains a small postcard on which the applicant should include a return address. This will enable the local election official to contact the applicant. If the FPCA is incorrect or lacks any information necessary to process the form, the local election official may return the postcard explaining what information is needed to complete the registration and/or ballot request.

While pre-1995 versions of the FPCA may still be in circulation, the FVAP recommends use of the 1995 revision only, due to changes in state laws.

6. Mailing the FPCA

The citizen should mail the FPCA in sufficient time to comply with all state or territory deadlines. The citizen should be certain that they allow enough time to receive, vote, and return an absentee ballot in time for it to be counted.

The FPCA does not require postage if mailed in the U.S. postal system, which includes all U.S. military post offices (APO, FPO) overseas as well as diplomatic pouches. Many Embassies and Consulates have access to U.S. military post offices. Those that have access will accept the FPCA and give it to the U.S. military post office where it will be mailed with no postage required. The FPCA may also be sent postage-free through the diplomatic pouch at Embassies and Consulates. However, the diplomatic pouch may not have a regular pick-up schedule. If you are mailing election materials from overseas and do not have access to a U.S.

Embassy/Consulate or an APO/FPO address, please affix the proper postage necessary to get the materials into the U.S. postal system. In some cases it might be better to pay for either the international mails or private air courier services.

Consular officers at Embassies or Consulates can provide the best mailing advice for citizens.

7. Electronic Transmission of Election Materials

Often, transmitting voting materials by mail prevents timely receipt and return of materials. When such conditions exist, possibly preventing an individual from voting, electronic transmission may be possible. However, a VAO should first refer to this *Guide* to determine if a state or territory permits faxing of voting materials, and if so, which voting materials a state or territory may allow to be faxed.

When faxing an application, voted ballot, or other election materials, the FVAP recommends use of one of the Electronic Transmission Service (ETS) numbers. These numbers are: DSN (military) 223-5527; 1-800-368-8683; or (703) 693-5527. For technical assistance, call 1-800-966-8683. Overseas citizens with other questions may reach the FVAP by using the international toll-free numbers (from some countries) listed on the FVAP website at **www.fvap.ncr.gov**.

Citizens should fax the FPCA or ballot themselves in private. If a VAO's assistance is required, his or her role is to perform these duties in an official capacity and protect the integrity of the electoral process and the confidentiality of the voter and his or her vote. Most states that permit faxing of the voted ballot require the voter to sign a waiver of his or her right of a secret ballot.

Also, after faxing, most states request that the citizen mail the completed FPCA or voted ballot to the local election official at the appropriate state or territory address listed in Chapter 3 of the *Guide*.

Appendix C explains the fax process and each state's and territory's procedures are in Chapter 3. Manuals on the ETS, which provide detailed instructions on the process to VAOs and local election officials, are available through normal distribution channels or directly from the FVAP.

8. Ballot Receipt and Late Counting

Some absentee ballots may arrive too late for the voter to execute the ballot, get it witnessed or notarized when necessary, and mail it to the local election official so that it arrives by the indicated deadlines. It is advisable to vote the ballot and return it as soon as possible, even if the citizen believes it will not arrive in time to be counted. Some states and territories (see Chapter 3) allow for counting beyond election day if the ballot is postmarked on or before the date of the election. If the citizen's state or territory is not among those that allow late counting, the citizen should mail the ballot anyway. The FVAP has initiated court actions in the past which required some states to count absentee ballots received past normal deadlines.

For the states and territories which allow late ballot counting, citizens should ask the postal clerk to handstamp the envelope verifying the ballot's mailing date.

9. Ballot Delays

The possibility that local election officials may not receive the necessary information to print absentee ballots until close to election day can be a problem for absentee voters.

One major cause of delay in preparing and mailing ballots is litigation by candidates to be placed on the ballot or to remove an opponent's name from the ballot, or because of objections to the format of the ballot.

Often the FVAP is able to anticipate which states or localities may not be able to mail ballots in time. This information will be transmitted, as available, to voting assistance personnel through department and agency Voting Assistance Officers.

10. Marking and Mailing the Ballots

Almost every state or local election district includes instructions for marking the ballot. Frequently these instructions call for a procedure that requires the service of a VAO or other knowledgeable person.

Caution should be taken not to compromise the voter's right to the secrecy of the ballot.

11. The Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB)

The FWAB is a back-up ballot that can be used by a voter under three very specific conditions. To be eligible for this ballot, a citizen must:

1. Be located outside the United States, including APO and FPO addresses.
2. Apply for a regular ballot early enough so that the appropriate local election official **receives** the request at least 30 days before the election.
3. Not have received the requested regular absentee ballot.

The FWAB must be received by the local election official not later than the deadline for receipt of regular absentee ballots under state or territory law. Connecticut is not required to accept the FWAB.

Some states now allow the FWAB to be used by military and overseas citizens in elections other than general elections, or for offices other than Federal offices. Therefore, it is important to consult Chapter 3 of this *Guide* regarding use of the FWAB. Also, the FVAP may take legal action on or enter an ad hoc agreement with a state to allow expanded use of this ballot. The FVAP will notify VAOs regarding any changes to the parameters governing the use of the FWAB through the Voting Information News newsletter, voting news releases and the on-line edition of this *Guide*.

Note: A sample Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot, (SF 186) with instructions can be found on pages **21-24**.

12. State Special Write-In Absentee Ballot

Several states provide a State Special Write-In Absentee Ballot to assist citizens, such as submariners, missionaries, Peace Corps personnel and other individuals in extremely isolated areas, who know before the election they will be unable to use their state's regular absentee voting procedures. It should not be confused with the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot.

The eligibility requirements for a State Special Write-In Absentee Ballot are set by the individual states and can be found in the various state and territory pages in Chapter 3 of this *Guide*.

13. Voting In Person

Citizens who live within the United States may be able to register and vote where they live. This generally applies to eligible members of the U.S. Uniformed Services and their family members regardless of

whether they live on or off a military installation. In short, any qualified person who can satisfy a state's or territory's legal residence requirement can register and vote in that state or jurisdiction.

Registering to vote at your new place of legal residence will cancel your registration at your previous residence and may cause you to incur state or local tax liabilities. For those who may be able to choose to vote absentee in one state or territory or in person in another, tax consequences and other legal effects of changing voting residence should be considered. Voters should consult legal counsel. See *Appendix E* for probable state tax liabilities.

If stateside, the VAO should contact local election officials where the installation is located and become familiar with registration procedures in order to assist military and dependents who vote locally.

Many states and territories have systems of mail registration. These states permit applicants to register by mailing a state prescribed form in lieu of in-person registration.

Some localities operate mobile registration units as a convenience to citizens. Others expand registration opportunities through different methods. For additional information on registration in a particular community, citizens and voting assistance personnel may contact state or local election officials. VAOs at the department or agency level are also able to provide assistance in these matters.

14. Late Registration

Many members of the U.S. Uniformed Services and overseas citizens go through a transition period when they first leave the Uniformed Services or return home from overseas employment and may not know where they will take up permanent residence. Others may move to a new location and not meet the state's residency requirements. Sometimes, the date of discharge or return from overseas and a state's registration requirement may disenfranchise a recently discharged military member, their eligible family members and overseas citizens. Some states have special procedures to allow these persons to register and vote.

In most of these cases, the registration is only valid for the next election.

Chapter 3 of this *Guide* includes information on those states which allow late registration. States and territories are continuously passing legislation to facilitate voting by military members and overseas citizens. If the *Guide* does not indicate that the state or territory allows late registration, the citizen can check the on-line version of this *Guide* at www.fvap.ncr.gov or contact the local election official to see if the state or territorial laws have changed to allow late registration.

15. Reporting Irregularities

Voting Assistance Officers (VAO) should report any irregularities in the voting process to their department or agency headquarters VAO. These will be further reported to the FVAP and appropriate action will be taken.

The FVAP strongly encourages voting assistance personnel to make suggestions for improving absentee voting procedures and this *Guide*. Suggestions should be forwarded to the FVAP through department or agency VAOs.

16. FVAP Reports to the President and Congress

The FVAP conducts periodic surveys of voting assistance personnel and is required by law to submit a report to the President and Congress. The surveys are designed to measure the effectiveness of the voting assistance program and the availability and use of informational support materials at any given time during the election year. Voting assistance personnel are encouraged to discuss all aspects of the program with the FVAP.

17. Other Ways to Obtain a Ballot and Vote

Proxy Procedure

Several states and territories allow individuals other than the prospective voter to act on the voter's behalf to register the voter and/or request an absentee ballot for the citizen; however, under no circumstance may a person cast a ballot on behalf of another person. Refer to the appropriate state or territory in Chapter 3 for more details.

In Person at the Polls

A citizen who is able to vote in person in his or her own district should take advantage of the opportunity. Voting in person does not necessarily preclude registering by absentee process.

In some states, applying for an absentee ballot will not automatically rule out voting at the polls. A few states even permit someone who has already marked and returned an absentee ballot to vote in person, thereby nullifying the absentee ballot.

18. Providing Information on Candidates & Issues

Voting motivation programs should encourage people to vote and inform them that voting is a civic responsibility rather than a legal obligation.

It is the Voting Assistance Officer's responsibility to inform the citizen about the procedures to follow in order to vote. It is the citizen's responsibility to obtain information about candidates and issues.



Some of the best sources for citizens to obtain such information are hometown newspapers, magazines and newspapers with national circulation, radio and television, and information obtained directly from the political party and campaign committee offices supporting a particular political candidate or proposal. The DoD Voting Information Center provides information on candidates and issues. Citizens may call 1-800-438-VOTE (8683), (703) 588-1343 or DSN (military) 425-1343 to reach the DoD Voting Information Center or toll-free using the numbers listed on the FVAP website at www.fvap.ncr.gov. Other sources of information about candidates and issues for members of the military and their family members include Armed Forces Radio and Television Service (AFRTS), *Stars and Stripes*, the American Forces Information Service (AFIS), as well as newspaper articles and features distributed for military editors and used by the American Forces Press and Publications Service (AFPPS).

19. VAO Restrictions on Distributing Partisan Information

The VAO must not provide partisan information on candidates and issues to civilians, military personnel or their family members, but may refer citizens to the above sources of information. Further, VAOs are not to distribute any literature from candidates or partisan organizations. Organizations become partisan when they endorse or imply endorsement of candidates or identify with issues in a campaign. Military VAOs should contact the FVAP and also obtain the

Commanding Officer's approval before distributing literature from any outside organization.

The Department of Defense's policy regarding the maintenance of political neutrality is stated in DoD Directive 5410.18:

"The Armed Forces and the Defense Establishment belong to all the American people . . . Department of Defense support of and participation in events and activities in the civilian domain will reflect that fact . . . [and such] support and participation must not directly or indirectly (a) endorse or selectively benefit or favor, or appear to endorse or selectively benefit or favor any private individual, group, corporation (whether profit or nonprofit), religion, sect or sectarian group, quasi-religious or ideological movement, fraternal organization, political organization, or commercial venture, or (b) be associated with the solicitation of votes in a political election."

20. How to Implement a Voting Assistance Plan

The Voting Assistance Officer (VAO) has the important responsibility of providing accurate, nonpartisan voting information and assistance to the individual attempting to register and/or vote. The organization and effectiveness of a VAO may very well determine whether a citizen will understand how to vote. Each VAO can accomplish their voting assistance plan without pressure by holding informational classes and informal discussions concerning voting and the responsibilities of a concerned citizenry.

When developing a local voting assistance plan, the VAO should consider the following:

- Visit the FVAP's website at www.fvap.ncr.gov
- Help U.S. citizens to register and obtain a ballot.
- Encourage them to learn about the candidates, the issues and to vote.
- Distribute all voting materials in a timely manner.
- Make certain you have four FPCAs for each person for whom you are responsible, including family members. In addition, you must make in-hand delivery of the FPCAs by August 15th for citizens outside the U.S., September 15th for citizens within the U.S.
- Make certain you have one FWAB for each person you are responsible for.



VAOs should also remind citizens to use the FPCA to notify their local election officials of address changes.

- Display the Election Calendar poster, and put your name and telephone number on the bottom. In addition, display motivational posters.
- Get the FVAP voting news releases and distribute this information widely.
- Use the *Voting Information News* newsletter and make it available to others. Extract information from this newsletter and make it available to your local media for coverage.
- Encourage use of the DoD Voting Information Center.
- Circulate copies of the FVAP pamphlets titled, *How To Do It! Vote Absentee* and *Communicating With Your Elected Officials*.
- Utilize the motivational Get Out The Vote Public Service Announcements in print, audio and video format in local media.
- Use the Ombudsman Service when necessary.
- Review the military or civilian on-line training at www.fvap.ncr.gov for advice and suggestions.

21. The Scope of a Civilian Voting Assistance Plan

Many U.S. citizen organizations and corporations outside the U.S. have designated a Voting Assistance Officer (VAO) for a two-year tenure. This VAO will serve as the organization's primary point of contact to work with the FVAP to carry out an effective voting assistance effort for the 2000-01 election years, and if so designated, for future election years.

The FVAP will provide the necessary materials for organizing and directing the organization's voting assistance program. Those materials include: a 2000-01 Voting Action and Information Support Plan outlining a schedule of action for the election year and a Voting Assistance Kit which contains all the essential materials for an effective voting assistance program.

VAOs will also receive FVAP voting news releases and the monthly *Voting Information News* newsletter.

VAO's responsibilities will include:

- Expanding citizen outreach within the local community to include direct contact with civic groups, American Chambers of Commerce, colleges and universities, and similar organizations.
- Serving as coordinator for the FVAP's on-site and video teleconferencing workshops.
- Planning and ensuring that overseas U.S. citizens, including eligible family members, are informed

of current registration and voting procedures and the importance of participating in the democratic process. The briefings should begin 60 days before the election months for primaries and be repeated during the week of Overseas Citizens Voters Week (June 25 through July 1, 2000).

- Conducting non-partisan voter registration drives.
- Ensuring in-hand delivery of FPCAs to overseas U.S. citizens not later than August 15, 2000.
- Submit a summary to the Director, FVAP, not later than December 2000, on the voter outreach efforts conducted during the election year.

22. The Scope of a Military Installation Voting Assistance Plan

Each Commanding Officer (CO) has the overall responsibility for the operation of a successful voting assistance program within the command. Usually, the CO will appoint an officer to act as Voting Assistance Officer (VAO) to organize and direct the command's voting assistance program. The command's VAO will ensure that each subordinate unit and organization appoints, on orders or in writing, an officer or non-commissioned officer to organize and direct voting assistance activities within each unit or organization.

COs should conduct orientation briefings with unit VAOs prior to the start of primary elections. These briefings are intended to prepare unit VAOs for their duties and to ensure that voting assistance materials are on hand prior to the commencement of the 2000-01 command voting assistance program.

A minimum of four FPCAs and one FWAB should be available for each person, including unit personnel and eligible family members.

In addition, the CO is required to plan and ensure that briefings of military personnel, their eligible family members, and civilian employees in overseas locations, and their eligible family members, are scheduled at the installation and/or unit level. The briefings should inform all these individuals of current registration and voting procedures and the importance of voting.

As for timing, these briefings should begin 60 days before the election months for primaries and be repeated during Armed Forces Voters Week (September 3 - 9, 2000).

The following officials are involved in carrying out the voting assistance program:

- **The Commanding Officer** — The CO must emphasize the voting program in staff meetings and other command meetings. He or she must communicate support of the program and encourage staff participation and involvement throughout the command.
- **Unit Voting Assistance Officers** — VAOs have an opportunity to personalize a command's voting assistance efforts. Success of a voting assistance program in any election year may well depend upon the availability and quality of service that unit Voting Assistance Officers provide their personnel.
- **Legal Assistance Officer** — Legal questions which cannot be answered by the unit VAO should be referred to the command's legal staff.
- **Public Affairs/Information Officer** — This officer ensures that voting information is included in installation or unit publications such as newspapers, newsletters, daily bulletins, other printed media, where applicable, and Armed Forces Radio and Television Service. The Public Affairs Officer and the VAO should coordinate the activities for Armed Forces Voters Week (September 3 - 9, 2000).
- **Inspector General (IG)** — The IG, acting on behalf of the CO, has an interest in any program which concerns the rights of personnel and family members and helps to ensure that VAOs are trained and equipped to give assistance to citizens in the command.
- **Chaplain** — As a respected member and leader in the military community, the chaplain can be of help in disseminating information to members of the community.
- **Publications, Supply or Distribution Officer** — This officer ensures that installation and tenant unit VAOs receive copies of this *Guide* and other voting program informational materials. These materials include a minimum of four FPCAs, and one FWAB, for each member of the unit or command and their eligible family members.
In addition to normal distribution of informational material, the FVAP may disseminate additional voting materials throughout the election year. It is essential that distribution officers notify VAOs immediately upon receipt of these items.
- **Officers-in-Charge** — VAOs should contact Officers in charge of exchanges, commissaries, special services activities, medical and dental facilities, education centers, family centers, etc., to coordinate the display of voting information materials and for possible participation in Armed

Forces Voters Week activities (September 3 - 9, 2000).

- **Installation Telephone Supervisor** — The VAO should ensure that the installation Voting Assistance Officer's name, location, and phone number are known to the telephone operators so that inquiries regarding voting assistance may be referred to the appropriate person.

In addition to these officials, a resourceful VAO will make use of the many organizations that perform local service functions such as:

- **Wives Club** — This organization performs many service functions for the community and is always responsive to worthy community projects.
- **Boy/Girl Scouts, and Other Youth Groups** — These organizations carry out numerous citizenship-oriented service projects. Contact the installation officer who serves as the local scout leader.
- **Veterans and Service Organizations** — The Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, the Non-Commissioned Officers Association and the League of Women Voters are typical of organizations that perform important community services and are eager to be of assistance. Contact local leaders.

local election officials in the 1996 elections as compared to the 1992 elections.

Nevertheless, FPCA processing problems do continue. The most common issues cited by Local Election Officials are:

- No, or inadequate, voting residence address
- Illegible or inadequate mailing address (i.e., where the ballot is to be sent)
- Application sent to the incorrect jurisdiction
- Failure to indicate Party preference for primary elections
- Illegible handwriting
- FPCA received too late
- Required areas of FPCA not complete
- No signature
- No Date-of-Birth given
- FPCA not witnessed or notarized (where required)

VAOs can help reduce these processing problems by advising citizens about the proper way to fill out an FPCA. Local Election Officials must determine the citizen's eligibility to vote based solely on information provided on the FPCA, and if there are questions or additional information is required, they need enough time and the correct contact information to resolve the issue.

23. Problems Experienced in Processing FPCAs by Local Election Officials

Redesign of the FPCA in 1995 and educational and training efforts in 1996 substantially reduced the incidence of FPCA processing problems encountered by



VAOs should also remind citizens to use the FPCA to notify their local election officials of address changes.



Your Voice, Your Choice:

VOTE!

FEDERAL WRITE-IN ABSENTEE BALLOT (FWAB)
SF 186, Revised 1995

